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*The Story of the
Yale University Press
told by a Friend*



“IT SHOULD BE A GOLDEN RULE
WITH ALL HISTORIC PUBLISHING-HOUSES
TO PRESERVE THEIR ANNALS
AND IN DUE COURSE GIVE THEM
TO THE WORLD.”



THE STORY OF THE
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

TOLD BY A FRIEND



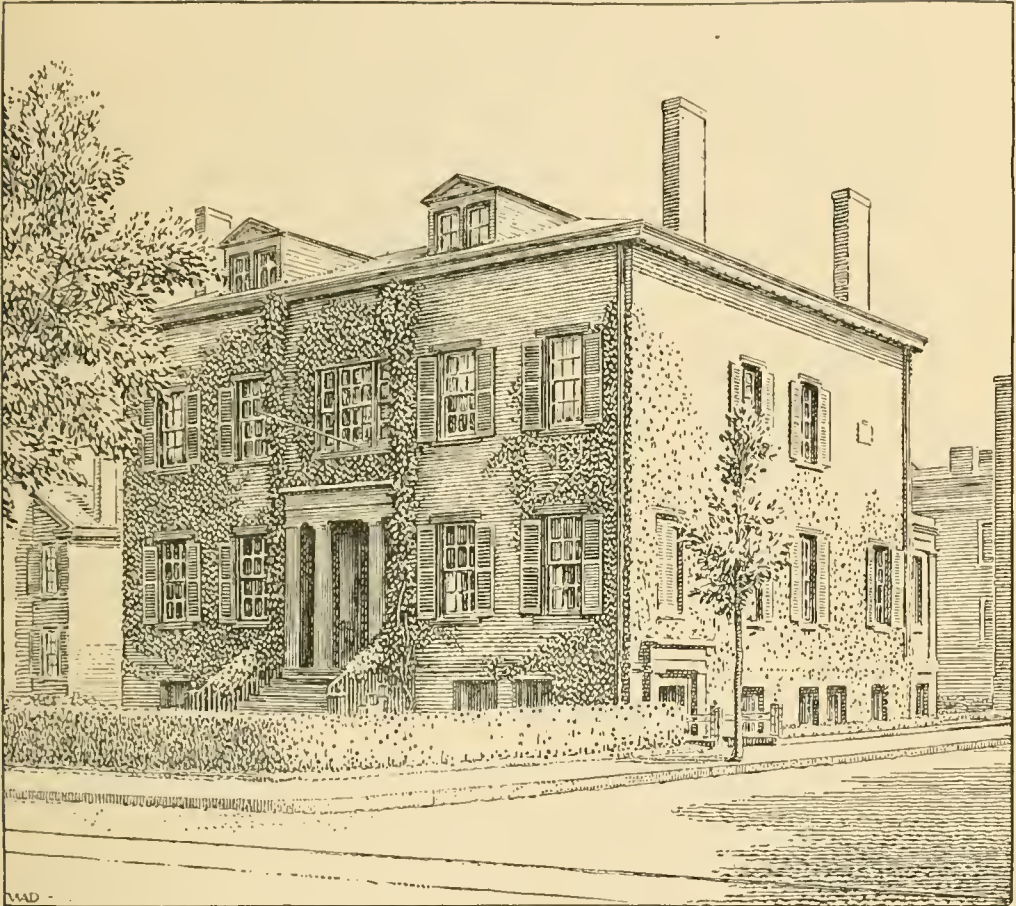
New Haven:

At the Earl Trumbull Williams Memorial.

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The Earl Trumbull Williams Memorial.

THE STORY OF
THE YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS TOLD
BY A FRIEND



Chuguet 1926.

IN 1908 several people began talking together about starting a publishing organization in connection with Yale. The more they thought of the possibilities in it the more interested they grew. They saw what a power a great publishing-house might become. To build up a "Yale University Press" seemed an exciting adventure, when they thought of all it might do for letters, and for scholars and scholarship. . . .

But when they tried to carry out their plans, in hard actuality, they had to begin pretty small. The first quarters of the new Press were a pigeonhole in a busy man's desk, and this desk was in a busy office downtown in

New York: one that had nothing to do with books, except account-books, and grudged the Press even a pigeonhole. So the Press moved after a while to a building near Washington Square. There it had a whole room. It was only a little black cave of a room, but it was a great advance on one pigeonhole. The busy man who had started the Press couldn't go up there often; he had to stay down in his office: but one of his family went and sat there. And she kept a record of all the Press's work, in a ridiculous book, four by seven, with a thin cover that looked like butchers' paper. This was the cashbook, ledger, order-book, shipping-book, and general record, combined. She rushed down each morning to see if the postman had shoved any mail through the slot in the door; and when some of it was orders she had to telephone downtown at once to announce them, because orders make you happy when you are starting a publishing business. One morning there was a splendid order for thirty-one books, and it took her all day to get them tied up and sent off and billed for.

Nowadays the main offices are in New Haven in a big old house on the Green;* and there is a branch besides, in New York (which is well worth a visit) and I don't know just how many hundred books it would take to be a large order, now.

II.

The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man. Nothing else that he builds ever lasts. Monuments fall; nations perish; civilizations grow old and die out; and, after an era of darkness, new races build others. But in the world of books are volumes that have seen this happen again and again, and yet live on, still young, still as fresh as the day they were written, still telling men's hearts of the hearts of men centuries dead.

And even the books that do not last long, penetrate

*This house formerly belonged to Governor Ingersoll, of Connecticut, and was built about 1830. It was purchased as a home for the Press, in 1919, by Mrs. Harriet T. Williams, in memory of her son, Lieutenant Earl Trumbull Williams.

their own times at least, sailing farther than Ulysses even dreamed of, like ships on the seas. It is the author's part to call into being their cargoes and passengers,—living thoughts and rich bales of study and jeweled ideas. And as for the publishers, it is they who build the fleet, plan the voyage, and sail on, facing wreck, till they find every possible harbor that will value their burden.

.

Any great university might well be proud to go into publishing. Indeed it is more appropriate for universities to do it than business men.

III.

The publisher who thinks of himself as a builder of ships, will naturally care about designing and building them well. The types and the paper and the bindings must be stately and strong—or have whatever characteristics suit the contents and life of each volume. But the Yale University Press has had no plant of its own. Each time that it publishes a book it must farm out this work.

Through the aid of the master printers who work for it, it has produced handsome books; but it has needed at least a little press, to try out types and styles. And it has wanted much more. It has wanted presses enough and a bindery to make its own books: a place where men could work and experiment in the old craftsman spirit.

In most printing- and publishing-houses it is necessary to put money first, and to plan as a rule to make the most profits—not the best books. But printing is more than a business: it is an art or a craft; and it should not be learned only in establishments that are conducted for profit. To be sure, a man can get a good business-training in such an establishment: he can also get a standardized training as a practical printer, and in some places he can even become pretty good at the art: but the latter is subordinate, necessarily, in a commercial establishment. And there ought to be more printing-houses in the world where it isn't. Printing-houses where beauty of workmanship and design would come first, and where the object would be to make each book

perfect if possible. Not books de luxe only, but every kind, each in its own way.

Such a place should be run partly as any business concern should be run, because efficiency, system, and new ways to check waste, repay study: and partly as a laboratory and training-school for young master printers: a school where all kinds of experiments can be thought out and tried.

Under the will of Earl Trumbull Williams the Press has now received a bequest which has enabled it to install the beginnings of a plant of this kind. But any further development must depend upon what other men do in helping the Press to go ahead; and meantime things must wait. If the Press were to beg urgently enough for it, help might come now, but the help that comes reluctantly or as a charity is not the best kind. The best kind, of course, is that which comes from men who care what it means, and who like to be builders of something that is really worth while, and who will enjoy watching their work grow, and get some fun out of giving.

The Princeton University Press has a beautiful plant, which was given it by Mr. Charles Scribner in this kind of spirit. At this plant the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* is printed and some of the undergraduate periodicals. When Yale can have a place like that, the undergraduates who are interested in pressrooms can come around and learn how to print a paper as well as to publish it. Why should Yale's youthful editors and reporters have so much chance to practice, while the artist printers that Yale might be training have no chance at all? The right kind of printing helps as much to make the written word carry, as the right kind of voice helps the spoken word.

It would be a good thing if every man who writes knew a little of printing. An author who did would know how to prepare his manuscripts properly, which is something that not one in a hundred has sufficient idea of; and that would save making great numbers of needless corrections. These avoidable wastes, all of which, of course, add to the cost, are stupidities that civilized printers should try to eliminate.

There are a number of other useful things that the Press wants to do. Sometimes, for instance, a highly trained man appears, hot on the trail of some research, the results of which would be of wide interest to the world, and of value, but which he can do little or no work on, because he must earn his living. If the Press had the funds, it would first make sure his work had great worth, and then it could advance such a man enough money to live on—economically it goes without saying—until he completed his task. To be able to step in and do that, and then publish the book, would be one of those services to mankind that are best worth performing. And think of the difference that this help would make in the career of that man: how much sooner he would be advanced to the rank where his brains could do most, and how much more fruitful to all of us his life would thus be.

Even small sums of money might accomplish large results in this way. And large sums could sometimes be used with tremendous effect. The fact that the Press

is surrounded by such expert advisers,—the men on Yale’s faculties and others,—should ensure wise expending.

Yale
University
Press.

V.

I was saying to myself the other day, “What is Yale, after all?” A spectator might describe it as a place where young men go, each year; and where older men teach them, and die; and where others replace them. But Yale isn’t just a place nor those men. It’s much more—or it’s nothing.

When any good Yale man tries to answer a question like that, he is swayed by old memories and old feelings, and they sometimes go deep. So in order to cut out any emotion that is not wholly impartial, let us ask the same question about other places: What is Harvard, or Princeton?

Well, any institution that a lot of men have worked for, and loved, becomes a *living force*: that is about the only answer I know. What kind of a living force it is

depends on the way it affects those around it. And that in turn depends on the kind of love men have put into it.

The various orders of knighthood in the era of chivalry, the monasteries that ardent young priests joined—they were all living forces. Famous regiments like the Black Watch of Scotland, or Napoleon's Old Guard—every man who joined one of them felt he was more of a man.

This has been true of Yale.

These intangible, stirring inspirations come into existence, only when men have given themselves, consciously or not, to the making of them. Then—what strength they exert!

In the old Saybrook days, it was when those ministers came and gave books, that the thing that we call Yale was born. Their gifts and the spirit behind them, and their willingness to work for the place, and their faith in the good it would do—*that* was what gave it life. Yale was only a small force at first. It is a mighty one now.

And the Yale University Press was conceived in this spirit.

VI.

Yale
University
Press.

I don't suppose, when Yale started, it seemed to the neighbors supremely worth helping. It was only a little collegiate school, in a small country town. But if you and I had been living then, and could have foreseen what Yale was to be, it would certainly have roused us to get out and work hard to strengthen her. We should have felt that one of the best and finest uses we could make of our lives would be to do anything we could to build up such a place.

It is the Yale University Press that is now in that stage. It has greatness ahead of it, much more greatness than we dream of perhaps. But today it is young. A few men are putting their hearts into it, a few more their gifts, or their interest and good will. It is growing. It will all be worth while. . . .



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